



U.S. Department of Justice

Civil Rights Division

Office of the Assistant Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530

DEC - 1 2011

The Honorable Frank Coleman
County Court Judge
500 Constitution Avenue, 3rd Floor
Meridian, MS 39301

Re: Investigation of the Lauderdale County Juvenile Court

Dear Judge Coleman:

This is to inform you that the United States Department of Justice is commencing an investigation concerning allegations that the Lauderdale County Juvenile Court is violating the Fourth Amendment, Due Process, and Equal Protection rights of juveniles from Meridian, Mississippi. The investigation will be conducted pursuant to the pattern or practice provision of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, 42 U.S.C. § 14141 ("Section 14141"), which prohibits any governmental agency with responsibility for the administration of juvenile justice from engaging in a pattern or practice that deprives juveniles of constitutional or federal statutory rights, and the anti-discrimination provision of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin by recipients of federal financial assistance. The investigation will be conducted in conjunction with an investigation by the Department of Justice concerning allegations that the Meridian Police Department is violating the Fourth Amendment, Due Process, and Equal Protection rights of juveniles referred for law enforcement action by the Meridian Public School District. By separate letter today to the Honorable Cheri Barry, we provided notice of the investigation of the Meridian Police Department.

The investigation will seek to determine whether there are systemic violations of the Constitution or laws of the United States in the administration of juvenile justice in Lauderdale County. We have not reached any conclusions about the subject matter of the investigation. We believe that you and other Lauderdale County officials want to operate the Juvenile Court consistent with the requirements of the Constitution and federal law. During the course of our investigation, we will consider all relevant information, particularly the efforts that Lauderdale County has undertaken to ensure compliance with the Constitution and federal law.

Should we identify deficiencies during the investigation, we will provide real time technical assistance, where possible and appropriate. Upon completion of our investigation, if we conclude that there are no systemic violations of constitutional or federal statutory rights by

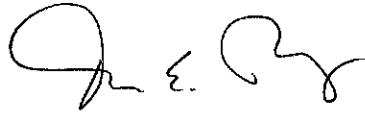
- 2 -

Lauderdale County, we will notify you that we are closing the investigation. If, on the other hand, we conclude that there are federal violations, we will take appropriate action, beginning with informing you of the findings and attempting to work with Lauderdale County to remedy these violations.

In our years of enforcing Section 14141, the good faith efforts of state and local jurisdictions working with us have enabled us to resolve our investigations without resort to contested litigation. We can assure you that we will seek to minimize any potential disruption our efforts may have on the operations of the Juvenile Court.

Our Special Litigation Section will be handling this matter and will contact your office to discuss the next steps. The Chief of the Special Litigation Section, Jonathan M. Smith, may be reached at 202-514-5393, and Deputy Chief Shelley Jackson may be reached at 202-305-3373.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. E. Perez', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas E. Perez
Assistant Attorney General

cc: The Honorable Veldore Young
County Court Judge
500 Constitution Avenue, 3rd Floor
Meridian, MS 39301

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